

“Making Sense Of Our 21st Century Media Culture”

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By Dr. Rob Williams (www.robwilliamsmedia.com)

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Introduction: Dr. Phyllis Zrzavy; Keene State College

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INTRODUCTION

Good morning!

There are few finer feelings than taking a ten-pound sledge maul and dropping it through the chassis of an old television. I'll leave it at that.

It's been my pleasure and privilege to be working with the ACME coalition for three years now, and the work that we do is not done in a vacuum. We've got some remarkable folks – teachers and students, public health advocates, independent media makers, concerned citizens, parents, activists of all stripes, from across the political spectrum, I might add involved in the coalition across the country.

So as an aside, I would invite all of you if you are interested to visit www.acmecoalition.org to find out more information about ACME.

DEFINING “MEDIA”

What is a “medium”?

A “medium” is a form of communication that transmits messages, tells stories, constructs certain realities about the world.

And I am here to tell you that I love media, because stories are what make us human. I have some problems with the way media are used in our culture, but media in and of itself is not the demon here.

Now, when I talk about media with folks, usually I have a big screen and I will share with you some multi-media clips. But since we're on the radio, let's remember the old adage about radio – radio trumps television because the pictures are better.

BACKGROUND: OUR TWO BIG QUESTIONS

I'd like to ask and answer two questions with you today.

First, what ingredients define out 21st century media culture?

Secondly, how can we equip ourselves to make sense of our 21st century media culture?

Those are the two questions I'd like to explore with you today.

And I'd like to start off by simply stating that we live in the midst of the most powerful and pervasive media culture that has ever existed in world history. I'm a historian by training, and if you study world history, the arc of human civilization, from ancient Mesopotamia and on, if you spin the dial back 8,000 years and then spin it up again to the current moment, you cannot find a civilization or a society that has ever existed on the face of the planet that enjoys a more complex and intimate and mediated relationship with media than our own.

And much of this media we consume in our media culture is very new. We've been around on the planet – living in settled agricultural societies for 7,000 or 8,000 years. Radio has been around for 100 years. Television has been around 50 years or so. The Internet has been around 20 years, give or take. First-person-shooter video games have been around 5 or 6 years. As human beings, we are struggling, I think, to make sense of this electronic media culture in which we find ourselves, of which most of it is very new. And I simply think we have to acknowledge that. It's new and it's very powerful.

THE US MEDIA LANDSCAPE: CHARTING THE CHANGES

Now, I was born in 1967. I'll tip my age here. That was the same year many of you probably remember that public broadcasting was created by act of Congress in this country, which led to the creation of PBS and, of course, NPR, National Public Radio. And all of us can simply do this as an exercise – simply chart the kinds of changes we've witnessed personally in the media landscapes we moved through since the time of our childhood or even in the past ten years or so.

TELEVISION

When I watched TV as a kid, there were three big commercial TV networks, and we can name them - ABC, CBS, and NBC – and this young publicly-funded upstart: public television, featuring Morgan Freeman and Big Bird and host of interesting characters that I grew up with as a child. Today, of course, we've got cable television, coming through the wires, we've got satellite television coming through the ether, we've got web television coming over the Internet, there are 1700 hundred television stations around the country, with the promise of many many more to come.

RADIO

When I was a kid, we had a dozen stations on the FM dial, and probably fewer than that on the AM dial. Growing up today, of course...I just dropped an XM satellite radio system into the dashboard of my car a few months ago which allows me to pick up close to 200 stations via satellite alone. There are 12,000 radio stations in this country, 10% of them, 1200, are owned by one large multinational corporation called Clear Channel – you may have heard of them. In the radio world, too, we've seen the exciting growth, and I hope it will continue, of what's called low-power FM radio – micro-radio – 100 watt stations transmitting community news, genuine community radio. In the state of Vermont, where I live, there are a number of new LPFM stations coming on line, including one in the Mad River Valley which I am privileged to work with, and it is really a joy to work with your neighbors to build an alternative independent media outlet for news, information, talk, music, commentary – it's a fabulous endeavor.

MUSIC DELIVERY

When I was a kid we listened to records for music. Remember those? Vinyl, grooved, records. I saved up my shekels and bought myself – product placement alert – an iPod a few months ago and I can store 10000 digital MP3 files as recording in my little iPod which fits in my pocket. I don't even have 10,000 songs, but I did rip all of my CD collection – I have about 6,700 songs, so if you have any extra songs you'd like to loan me to drop in my iPod at the end of this talk I'd be more than obliged to take them, as long as they're legally transmissible. That's an issue, of course. Copyright.

MOVIES

As a kid in my town going to the movies, there was a single screen theater in my town. It was about a ten minute drive from my house. And now, of course, even where I live in semi-rural Vermont there are more than 40 movie screens within a 45 minute drive, not to mention Blockbusters on every corner of most major cities, and my newest exciting movie-related discovery – again, product placement alert – Netflix, which allows you to go online, and for \$19.95 a month, you can purchase unlimited access to as many DVD movies as you can watch in a month period, and they'll mail them back and forth for you for free. I really enjoy movies and I find that pretty exciting. You can also, of course, stream movies over the Internet with a high-speed Internet connection, which is interesting and exciting.

NEWSPAPERS

As a kid growing up I had one daily newspaper. One daily newspaper. We've got 1400 newspapers now in this country, and of course, the newspaper industry,

traditional print journalism is in trouble, for a lot of different reasons. But getting access to that kind of information has never been easier; we've got 1,400 newspapers, 17,000 magazines, 20 million web sites for anybody who can get to a library or a school or can afford to bring home an Internet connection. We've got remarkable access to print-based, and increasingly, audio and video based information.

KEY CONCEPT: OPPORTUNITY COSTS (TRADE OFFS)

Now all of this is a bit bewildering. I think another starting place is to recognize that there are no goods or bads in our media culture; there are goods and bads. We live in a media culture, we live in a political culture that routinely divides things into two categories – have you noticed this? We've got Red states and Blue states, for example. You're either for us or against us. You're either a liberal or a conservative. God forbid we should embrace complexity or nuance in our thinking or in our own lives. I think this is part of the battle that we struggle with here.

So we must recognize that all media have trade-offs. There are good and there are bads that accompany any media experience, and the trick is to know both the goods and the bads. That's the trick.

OUR 21ST c. MEDIA LANDSCAPE: SOME STATISTICS

So if we look at the landscape of our 21st century media culture, what does it look like? We spend between 10 and 12 hours a day with media per 24 hours. The average American kid in this country grows up with access to 3 radios, 3 tape players (remember those cassettes?), 2 televisions, 2 VCRs, a video game player, a computer, plus a bewildering variety of print, and of course, the ever more ubiquitous cell phone...which we've all turned off this morning.

More sinister statistics, perhaps. Our children consume as many as 3,000 commercial messages a day, delivered across multiple media platforms, and they all contain the same message, ultimately, which, if we may paraphrase Shakespeare for just a moment: "to be, you gotta buy." We are conditioning a nation of young consumers, even as we ourselves are conditioned over time by the constant repetition of this particular message. In terms of the flow and control of information, as much as 90% of our media content – this is Ted Turner now, somebody who knows something about corporate media power - who points out that as much as 90% of our media content is ultimately owned by six large transnational corporations with, as George Gerbner, former dean of the Annenberg School of Communications likes to say, "nothing to tell, but everything to sell."

90% of our information ultimately owned by six large trans-national corporations.

I like to refer to those six large trans-national corporations as Big Media, and we know who they are:

Disney.
AOL Time Warner.
Newscorp.
Viacom.
Vivendi.

These are some of the giants, the corporate giants of our media culture.

In terms of time, statistically, by the time the average American reaches 70 years of age, he or she will have consumed ten years of television.

Now think about ten years, for a moment.

Ten years of television by the time we reach 70. And I've never known anyone whom, on her deathbed, said to family and friends gathered 'round, "If only I had watched just a few more episodes of 'American Idol,' my life would feel somehow more complete."

Or, "If I had just watched a few more 'Desperate Housewives' re-runs in syndication, my life would be whole."

So we have to think about our media culture in terms of these trade-offs.

I'm a parent now. I have a six-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son at home, so I'm very interested in media from a parent's perspective. And it's interesting to me that, from the statistics we've gathered, American parents claim that they spend fewer than 40 minutes a week engaged in "meaningful conversation" with their children, fewer than 40 minutes, but we can find the time to consume on average 28 hours of television a week, and yet we complain that we don't have enough time to get done what we'd love to get done.

So I think if we want to make sense of our media culture, we have to look at the goods and the bads – the trade-offs, in terms of time, in terms of our attention, in terms of our own personal development and the development of our children, in terms of our health, in terms of the health of our democracy, this democratic Republic which so many of us hold dear.

So, if we start with trade-offs, and we acknowledge the power and the pervasiveness of our media culture, then we can begin to make some sense of how we got here, and what are these ingredients that define our 21st century media culture.

SEVEN DEFINING INGREDIENTS OF OUR 21st MEDIA CULTURE

I like to just lay out seven of them.

1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL: WORD TO IMAGE

The first big change we've seen over the past several decades is what's called an epistemological change. Now, following in the tradition of Thoreau and Emerson, I feel like I have to throw in a big word from time to time. So, "epistemology" simply refers to the nature and origins of knowledge. Where does "knowledge," where does "Truth" come from?

And what we've seen in our media culture is a really dramatic shift, epistemologically speaking, away from the Word, with a capital "W" (the Word) and towards the Image. We're moving from Word to Image. So a picture right now is worth way more than 1,000 words in the context of our media culture. A picture is gold. A well-timed, well shot photo opportunity can carry the day where reason, rational discourse, may not. Print presents the world as an idea to be explored, the written word, and the spoken word as well, I think. But the Image presents the world as an Object, and there is a big world of difference between "world as idea" and "world as object."

And the great symbol of this epistemological change, of course, is the television, which is our culture's dominant story-teller still. 70% of Americans polled claim they get most if not all of their information about the world from television, which is truly staggering.

2. TECHNOLOGICAL: DIGITIZATION

So we have this epistemological change, accompanied by a remarkable technological change over the past several decades, and that is the digitization of information. Converting the world's information into a binary code of ones and zeros via the computer. And again, there are trade-offs here. So when we look at what story-telling tools we have, we have to wrestle with this digitization phenomenon.

And the great symbol of this, of course, is the personal computer, which has made possible the digitization of information for most of us who can access one. More than 50% of Americans now use the Internet on a regular basis to surf the web, and I think the implications of this are profound.

3. CULTURAL: PERSONALIZATION

The third big change we can lay out is what I call a cultural change – the personalization of our media culture. As I said before, when I was a kid, and I wanted to figure out what was sort of going on in the world in the early 70s, I

could consult one of three or four television networks if I chose to use TV as a source of news – big trade-off there.

Now, our news culture, as with so much of our media, has become balkanized. I can visit with Bill O'Reilly on the Fox News, or I can visit with CNN over here, and get very different versions of the day's events, or "spun" differently, as the spinmeisters like to say.

The great symbol of the personalization of our media content is the rise of the web log, which is called, conveniently, shorthand-wise, the "blog." A web log is simply an electronic diary, where anybody who is running this blog can record the day's events or record something of import in their own lives or for a larger organization or cause of which they are a part.

Now here's my favorite blog right now from Vermont. I've been spending a lot of time looking at blogs. Let me read this to you.

"He snores. On the couch, A lot! He traded hair for children. He mows the lawn. He drives the minivan. He fights with the kids over the Play Station controller. He likes to eat, doesn't like to jog. One of these days it's going to be hip for Supermodels to be seen with a guy like him. It won't last long, but what a ride. Who is he? He's the fat bald married guy, and he's not alone."

Fatbaldmarriedguy.com. So, anybody can have a blog. Even the "fat bald married guy." And that's what I mean by the personalization of our media content. There's a lot of other really wacky blogs out there – if you haven't looked at blogs yet, I encourage you to go take a look. It's pretty wild.

But this allows for anybody to participate, at some level, anyway, in terms of creating our media culture.

4. AESHETICS: CONVERGENCE

There's a fourth big change afoot, and that is what I like to call an "aesthetic" change. It's this notion of "convergence" – which is an industry buzzword – "convergence" – to refer to the blurring of lines between various media environments. Time was, when I was a kid anyway, you'd have the television in one corner of the room, the bookshelf in another, the radio in the kitchen, and you'd go out for a movie and maybe get a baby-sitter or bring the kids with you if it was family fare.

But what's happening now is the collapse of these boundaries, so that radio and computers and television and print are becoming mixed and intermingled – converging in some really interesting and sometimes disturbing ways. Print, radio, TV, movies, video games.

We're also seeing a blurring of the lines between "art," on the one hand, and "commerce," on the other. If you've watched the Super Bowl recently, or you've talked to people who've watched the Super Bowl, how many of them say to you "I don't really watch the Game. I just watch the commercials." And on a per second basis, of course, commercials are our most expensive and our most creative form of media right now, even though they are designed to sell us stuff. That's where the creativity is for many people; that's where the "buzz" is. So the collapse of the lines between art and commerce is an important trend, this thing called convergence.

And the great symbol of this for me is the phenomenon surrounding this cult film called "The Matrix." The original "Matrix" released in 1999 was a huge hit Hollywood movie, but it's not just a Hollywood movie, the Matrix. It's a Hollywood movie. It's a DVD with all kinds of exciting extras you can bring home and interact with on your DVD player. It's a soundtrack. It's an animated special. It's now a trilogy of Hollywood films. It's a video game. And in fact, if you really want to understand the story line of the second and third movies in the Hollywood movie series, you have to play the video game to make sense of the narrative in the films. It's also now, as of two months or three months ago, a global online web e-gaming community, so you can actually sign up and enter the Matrix via the Web and play The Matrix with people all over the world. So this is what I mean when I talk about "convergence," about media environments coming together in some new and novel and interesting and exciting and sometimes disturbing ways.

5. ECONOMICS: HYPER-COMMERCIALIZATION

So "convergence." The personalization of our media culture, these technological changes, these epistemological transformations, have helped usher in a fifth big change, an economic change, profound in nature. It's the "hyper-commercialization" of our media culture. It seems like wherever you turn, everything is up for sale.

And the symbol of this for me, personally, of this is the arrival of MTV – music television. I was in 9th grade when music television showed up in my neighborhood, and all of my 9th grade friends and I were just stunned, as I think the world was, by this remarkably powerful new storyteller: MTV. It's now a 25-year-old phenomenon, and kids growing up, and I work with a lot of them, sort of assume that MTV has always been around. "We've always had MTV."

No, it actually has a history.

Now the interesting thing about MTV is that everything on MTV is for sale. Everything on MTV is a commercial for something. So, when you watch music television you are watching a band perform a song selling a record but they're also selling a lot of other things – they're selling everything from fashion to

automobiles to the latest in gadgets to certain lifestyles and behavioral choices and this is what we mean by the hyper-commercialization of our media because if you've watched MTV it is a bit overwhelming, the way its produced. In fact, people who study media talk about the "post-MTV" generation, because everything is shortened and sped up and intensified to enhance the emotional appeal of the experience, and reason often goes out the window.

6. POLITICAL: "DEREGULATION"

So this has all been created, in part, by a sixth big change, political in nature, and that is the deregulation of our publicly owned airwaves which has been in the news quite a bit of late. The deregulation of our publicly-owned airwaves began in the 1980s with the deregulation of children's television, and if you haven't watched children's television in a while, just flick on the television on a Saturday morning and watch what's going on. It's pretty interesting in terms of hyper-commercialization, for sure.

But the centerpiece of this, the great symbol of deregulation is the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which was passed overwhelmingly by both Houses of Congress, and signed into law by then-president Bill Clinton. And the 1996 Telecom Act, in the name of giving consumers more choices (which is a line we hear quite a bit these days) essentially gave away \$70 billion of our publicly-owned digital television spectrum to Big Media for free. It was the single largest giveaway of public resources in our nation's history in 1996, and most Americans have never heard of this, not because they're stupid, but because the television news networks covered the story – all four of them – for a total of about twenty minutes over the course of the several months that the Telecom Bill was being debated on the floor of Congress, and mostly it was covered as a business story, and not as a story that had some profound implications beyond commerce.

So the 1996 Telecom Act is the centerpiece symbol for deregulation, and two summers ago, June 2 in the summer of 2003, the Federal Communication Commission, which is charged with regulating the structure of our media culture, handed down an even more interesting decision which would have made it possible for one large media corporation to own as many as (imagine this in Peterborough for just a minute) 8 radio stations, 3 television stations, the monopoly cable TV provider, and the daily newspaper –all by the same company.

Now of course, this seems a bit Orwellian. A lot of people on all sides of the political spectrum got a little cranky about this over the summer of 2003. More than 2 million Americans got off of their couches, turned off "Desperate Housewives," and wrote, or faxed, or e-mailed their Congressmen and FCC regulators and said – you know what? This is undemocratic. How far are we going to go with this?

And as a result, Congress got involved, and we actually won that fight or the moment. We blocked that particular FCC decision. But of course, the debate continues. And trust me when I tell you that Big Media is doing a lot of work down in DC right now behind the scenes lobbying on behalf of the latest changes coming down the pike to further deregulate the structure of our media culture. So this is a big fight, and it's something we can all get involved with, and I'll talk about that in a minute.

7. DISCURSIVE: OBJECTIVITY TO SUBJECTIVITY

Now the seventh and last big change I want to talk about is the shift, discursively, we're talking about how we talk about media issues and how we talk with one another...for a long time, especially in our journalism and news culture, we've held up this notion of "Objectivity" with a capital O as sacrosanct, that somehow the "Truth" with a capital T was out there, and we could find it.

But what's happening is Objectivity is giving way to Subjectivity. Subjectivity. First person, filled with an agenda, biased kinds of reporting. I'm not just talking about making up stories, like Stephen Glass, or Jayson Blair, or all the "journalists" who get hammered in the news for this.

The great symbol of this for me is talk radio. Rush Limbaugh really sort of invented, at least in terms of the modern radio phenomenon, this notion of subjective – I won't call it "journalism," because I think that Rush will be the first to tell you he's not a journalist, he's an entertainer. He's got a lot of tremendous cultural power as an entertainer.

Talk radio revels in subjectivity. And I've been having a lot of fun with my new XM satellite system because "America Right" and "Air America" are right next to each other on the XM dial. "America Right" is the more right-wing Fox news oriented talk radio programming, and "Air America" is the more liberal "Al Franken/Janine Garafalo/Randi Rhodes" Blue State programming. It's fun to flip back and forth between the two, as I often do, when I'm roaming the countryside.

So you get things, like, on "America Right," – "Annoy your liberal relatives. Listen to America Right." Or if you listen to "Air America: "Yes, its lies and distortion. But it's OUR lies and distortion. Air America – Like living in Canada, only warmer." Which is my new favorite "Air America" tag – who writes these?

But it raises this interesting shift that we're seeing towards "subjectivity" and away from "Objectivity" and I don't think that is necessarily all bad, as long as we recognize that there are a lot of opinions out there, and the idea is to bring these opinions together, and have them dialogue, discuss, debate, mix it up a little bit. I actually find talk radio refreshing in some ways, even though a lot of it is propaganda.

HEALTH, WEALTH, AND WISDOM

So these are the seven big changes that have ushered in our 21st century media culture. So what are we doing to make sense of this? Let me put it to you in two ways. First of all, I think that as a parent and an educator and a citizen, I'm interested in media that promote a couple of things: greater health, greater wealth, and greater wisdom for the people I care about (and you might recognize that I am borrowing from Ben Franklin and "Poor Richard" there, in the great Lyceum tradition). So I'm interested in health, wealth, and wisdom. But I think what we get in our media culture, what's served up to us so much of the time is:

Instead of health, we get "dis-ease." Literally, dis – ease.

Instead of wealth, for example...try saving your money instead of spending it. It's no accident that the average American family of 4 is in debt \$7000, 18.9 percent interest; number of personal bankruptcies is at an all-time high. You all know this, but instead of getting the message that saving money might be an important thing to do with it, we're constantly encouraged to spend our money. So instead of wealth, both material and spiritual (that's a whole other topic), we get debt and encouragement to spend money, often money we don't have, which is the premise of "credit."

Instead of wisdom, we often get ignorance. Strictly through the sheer amount of propoganda that is thrown around in our media culture.

TWO TRENDS IN TENSION

So I'm interested in health, wealth, and wisdom, and I'm hear to tell you that right now, in 2005, we are really at an extraordinary time in our media culture. I discern two trends – the first one is the sinister one for me, and that's the trend toward more commercialization, more consolidation, more centralization of our media culture.

But there's another second countervailing trend that I find really exciting and encouraging, and that is the trend towards small "d" democratization, decentralization, independent alternative forms of media. These two trends are in tension as we move forward from this point.

The idea is to maximize the second trend, the trend towards democratization, decentralization, independent alternative forms of media, and minimize the effects of the first trend: corporatization, consolidation, centralization. So that's our charge.

A THREE-PART SOLUTION

So how are we going to do that? I have three answers for you. I hope they'll satisfy. I mentioned the Action Coalition for Media Education before. Our interest in all of this is in education. We are educators. We have created this coalition to bring together public health people, and journalists, and teachers, students, parents, citizens, organizations representing the same to talk about this and to strategize ways to work together at both the local and the national level, but we think that all of this begins and ends with education.

All of this begins and ends with education.

So what we need in this country right now is cradle-to-grave media literacy education. We must teach, in our schools, and to the adults in our communities, how media work with and on us. That's what we must do, and that's what we are doing.

Now the good news is that all 50 states in this great country pay some lip service to media education in their state standards. I know this because I've looked at them all. So the ground is fertile, the ground is ripe. We can do this. We have the pedagogical rationale, we've got it in place in all 50 states. So what we have to do is to take the notion of what is often called "media literacy education" seriously.

DEFINING "MEDIA LITERACY" EDUCATION

The "literacy" in the phrase "media literacy" traditionally refers to the ability to read and write. Somebody who is "literate" can read and write. What we want to do is to expand the definition of "literacy" to all forms of media, so people can actually learn how to "read" a talk radio program, in the sense of thinking critically about what's going on. Or how to "read" a documentary. "Fahrenheit 911" comes to mind, Michael Moore's popular film, which was a really interesting mix of truth and propaganda. And the question is – can you separate out truth from propaganda? It's not easy to do in a film experience because we haven't been taught, we haven't been conditioned, we haven't been trained to do that. And that's what we're interested in doing. We want to take the "literacy" in "media literacy" seriously.

We also want to take the "media" in the two word phrase "media literacy" seriously, and teach people – students and citizens – that media are very powerful interests in our culture, particularly Big Media. They have billions of dollars at their disposal. They've got big agendas of their own, and those agendas don't often dovetail with greater health, greater wealth, and greater wisdom for us – whether we're talking about our kids, our schools, our democracy.

MEDIA EDUCATION - THREE KEY PARTS

So “media literacy education,” I think, is key in all of this. Now, if I were to define “media literacy education” in three words, it would be these:

1. Knowledge – how media work with and on us.
2. Skills – which I’ll get to in a moment.
3. Activism – or “civic engagement.”

We want to teach “skepticism.” We DON’T want to teach “cynicism.”

A cynical person will take a look at what’s happening, and keep the Remote in front of him, and not get off the Couch, because “Desperate Housewives” is just so darn good, and besides, “I can’t change anything anyway, can I?” That’s a Cynic thinking.

We’re interested in Skeptics – because skeptics will get off the Couch, and they’ll actually do something - whatever they can do – in their own communities. We’ll get to that in a minute. So we’re interested in teaching skepticism, not cynicism, Knowledge. Skills, Activism.

MEDIA EDUCATION AND CRITICAL THINKING – 3 SKILL SETS

Now, back to skills for a minute. I see four as being paramount.

1. Access – we want to teach people how to access new media. Find new sources of news, entertainment, information, they didn’t know were out there. Now if you consider yourself a progressive or a liberal, I think that also means spending time with Rush. Spending time in the “No Spin Zone” with Bill O’Reilly, just to know what those guys are saying and what kinds of realities they’re constructing. You don’t have to agree with them – in fact, that’s part of the fun, right?

And if you see yourself as a Conservative – a Red State person – then spend some time with Amy Goodman and “Democracy Now” – there’s an examples of some real grassroots investigative journalism, which is getting harder and harder to find. Spend some time with “Air America” – Al and Janine and Randi – not because you agree with everything they say, but because the contour lines are drawn in these places, and then think about stepping outside of the frame for a minute. Think about the stories, if we’re going to talk about access, that aren’t being talked about as much.

Peak Oil comes to mind.
911 comes to mind.
Election Fraud comes to mind.

That’s all I’ll say.

2. Analyze – Let’s teach people to analyze media. Break up media into its component parts. This is a key educational and life skill across the disciplines in any school doing its job. We want to teach basic critical thinking concepts. How bias works. How stereotyping works. How humor works – think of John Stewart and “The Daily Show”, for example – how humor works as a persuasive tool. How fear can be used as a persuasive tool. A moment of silence. It’s going to be July 4th tomorrow, right? Fear is the dominant persuasive technique in this post-911 landscape we live in.
3. Evaluate – Talk about the goods AND the bads. Remember, media aren’t either good or bad. Media are both good and bad. Goods and bads happen. What are the goods and the bads? That’s what we want to know. What does it mean to live in a media culture where 6 large transnational corporations own 90% of our media content? What are the goods and bads of that? Or living in a media culture where our kids see as many as 3,000 commercial advertisements a day. Or a media culture where it has never been easier to produce your own web site or your own Podcast via radio, or your own digital video story. And that’s the good news, again. There are some remarkably new and powerful media technologies that we and our kids ought to be embracing to tell our stories.

MEDIA PRODUCTION – FOURTH SKILL SET

So that leads to the second solution: producing our own media, and distributing it. We already have a lot of this going on. We’ve been conditioned to think of ourselves as media consumers, we are also media producers. When we write a poem, when we take a picture, when we compose a song, when we write an essay, when we shoot a movie, we are producing media. We have something to say. So let’s say it. Not just to ourselves, but let’s distribute it, as well. Let’s use the channels that exist and let’s create new ones. Low power FM, for example. Wireless municipal Internet, for example. Community cable television, for example.

ON ACTIVISM

And the third part of the solution is to get involved as citizens in challenging Big Media’s monopoly over the stories that dominate our culture. It’s easy to be critical of media.

The harder thing to do is to support journalists and newspapers we think are doing the hard investigative work.

To support the public health organizations challenging the media power of the \$9 billion a year tobacco industry, or the \$3 billion a year alcohol industry, and their propaganda that is targeting our children.

To support teachers and schools who are working hard on this. I sit on the school board in my town – I can tell you its not easy, but we're blessed with a new principal who has helped create a "commercial-free zone" in our school. There is no advertising in our school. Period. I think that's fabulous. What do we hang on the walls then? Kids art. Photographs. Paintings. It's wonderful.

Can we support elected officials who make media reform, media justice, media education part of their agenda? Yes we can. I'm blessed in Vermont to be represented by Congressman Bernie Sanders in Washington, who is leading the fight as an independent on media reform in DC, and that's wonderful.

I don't know how we're doing here in New Hampshire. I wouldn't comment. I don't know. But its something for you, if you live here, to investigate. Are your local and state and federal elected officials talking about media education? Media reform? Media justice?

And there are numerous ways to get involved here in terms of proposing new outlets. I mentioned Low Power FM. I mentioned community cable television. Municipal wireless.

CONCLUSION

So to wrap up. Let's make media education, let's make media production, let's make media reform and media justice a central part of the work we do. As parents. As teachers. As grandparents. As citizens. And if all of us do what we can, we will strengthen our schools, public health, and this democratic republic, which I think all of us, despite its flaws, are deeply invested in.

Thank you for listening.

For more useful resources, visit our partnering organizations through ACME at www.acmecoalition.org.